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SUBJECT: MAY 11 NIGERIA AVIAN FLU UPDATE

REF: ABUJA 1025

1. (SBU) Summary. Economic officer attended on May 9 the UN and foreign donors meeting on AI in Nigeria. UN and foreign officials expressed serious concern over the GON's inaction and evident desire to declare the AI outbreak "solved." The GON has moved the Avian Influenza Crisis Management Center from the presidential villa to a residential neighborhood, signaling AI's declining importance to the government. UN and DIFD officials said the GON's faltering momentum against AI likely has reached the point that they must take their concerns to President Obasanjo. Nigeria's health minister is out of Nigeria almost all of May. The UN agencies and foreign donors continue to seek a meeting with Nigeria's ministers of agriculture, health, and information. End summary.

2. (SBU) Economic officer attended on May 9 the UN and foreign donors meeting on the avian influenza (AI) in Nigeria. UN and foreign officials, citing Government of Nigeria (GON) statements, reported little change in the AI situation in Nigeria, but expressed serious concern over the GON's inaction and evident desire to declare the AI outbreak "solved."

Nigeria wants the problem to go away  
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3. (SBU) UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) officials said Nigeria's last reported outbreak of AI occurred on April 20 in Bauchi State. The FAO has finished the final draft version of its plan on active surveillance for review by Nigeria's minister of agriculture. The Nigerian public now considers AI to be no big deal in their country, and the perception is that the AI situation is nearly back to normal. Some officials share this view. Though Nigerian ministers dealing with the problem understand it is not solved, they appear to lack up-to-date information from the field. The GON is considering adopting the requirement that poultry farms be registered, in an effort to combat AI.

4. (SBU) A UN communications official said many Nigerians believe AI is a "white man's disease" or was brought to Nigeria by the West. The perception within Nigeria is that the United Nations is seeking to "impose" the issue of AI, but the virus has nearly "no importance" in almost every state, with no states reacting to it. Any action taken is only federal-to-state action, so AI must be placed on the states' policy agenda. Anti-AI efforts in Nigeria are failing partially because the system for reporting the virus is not linked to local traditional institutions, including religious leaders.

5. (SBU) A Department for International Development (DFID) official said concern remains high over Nigeria's inadequate human and animal AI surveillance. Donors could not respond appropriately until proper surveillance permits an accurate assessment.

6. (SBU) The GON announced May 9 that the Avian Influenza Crisis Management Center (AICMC) was being moved from the presidential villa banquet hall to an office in a residential neighborhood. GON AI meetings will be held there starting May 12. (Comment: While the AICMC's location in the presidential villa was at times inconvenient, moving the center from the banquet hall can be interpreted as Nigeria's downgrading AI's importance as an issue. End comment.)

7. (SBU) UN and DIFD officials said the GON's faltering momentum against AI likely has reached the point that they must take their concerns to President Obasanjo. They would note, as a justification, the extended absence from Nigeria of the health minister, who chairs the inter-ministerial AI Steering Committee and this week visited the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. The health minister, however, also must contend with polio's advance in Nigeria, the Global Fund's recent cancellation of USD 81 million in HIV

grants to Nigeria, and his own extensive travel outside Nigeria almost all of May.

U.S. Mission Nigeria's Planned Actions

18. (SBU) The economic counselor likely will meet next week with the FAO country representative concerning Nigeria's inaction against AI. The UN agencies and foreign donors have sought for more than three weeks a joint meeting with Nigeria's ministers of agriculture, health, and information, and they continue to pursue this, pending the health minister's return.  
CAMPBELL